

# Autology

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RT. REV. JOSEPH A. GOMEZ

## ***Preface To The Eulogy***

The decision of the Missionary Department of the A.M.E. Church made through its Secretary Dr. A. Chester Clark, to publish in booklet form this eulogy which I delivered at the funeral of Bishop Reverdy Cassius Ransom, is of unusual importance to the cause of Missions. What is seen here is more than a eulogy. True, it is the analysis of the life and works of a great public servant and a prophet of dimensions of influence and power in his Church. True, it is the story of a dedicated soul who gave succor to countless thousands in their quest for a better way; the story of a friend who exercised personal care and direction in the development of youth. But it is also the story of missionary zeal at its best. Behind all that is said is the pulsing gracious heart of a man of broad sympathies of democratic impulses; and of a mere lad an object, of that affection, a stranger who knocked at his door and found welcome; alien to the customs and ways of a new world, who found heart and purse extended in his development. It is the missionary story objectified and that brought added glory to the zeal vision and courage of such heroes as Scipio Bean, Henry McNeal Turner and others of our missionary history.

It comes at a time most critical in our history of missions; at a time when we face the necessity of either extending our efforts in the furtherance of our missionary work or abandoning it to more dedicated wills. It comes at a time when the Colored Peoples of the world are on the march; when independent movements of government are springing up in parts of Africa; when the Isles of the Caribbean have been granted Federation, and the consciousness of racial destiny is very much alive. The Church must guide these people as they set out in new and tortuous paths. No organization is better fitted to give guidance than the African Methodist Episcopal Church.

If then, this Eulogy is made to serve the purpose of arousing the Church to collective effort or to individual task such as that of Reverdy Cassius Ransom; if it brings us back to our early zeal and passion for missions and makes us missionary conscious, it will have served a worthy purpose. Surely, it can be said that Reverdy Cassius Ransom looks down upon us to-day with pride in the many "Sons of The Seas" whom he piloted to successful service; but he bids us move with greater haste and zeal to the fields whitening with harvest-grain.

This final word: No section of our Mission Field offers greater opportunity for development as the area of the West Indian Federation. Proximity to home base, the recent political complexion, the educational and social advantages of the people, make our tasks of missions more inviting and profitable. The district could be made the equal of any at home. This "Son of The Caribbean", now Bishop of the Church and privileged to give this Eulogy, expresses again his gratitude for a Church which gave us a Reverdy Cassius Ransom, and for the years of nurturing love which both the Church and he spent in my development. I commend this old and oft-neglected field to the Missionary heart of my Church.

J. G.



## **Reverdy Cassius Ransom**

*PREVAILER EXTRAORDINARY*

It is significant that shortly after the death of Reverdy Cassius Ransom we took up his favorite Bible to find this portion of the life of Jacob heavily scored. This story of unusually poignant and dramatic impact had great meaning for him as it must for all of us. It is a story deeply personal and intensely human. For we are all strugglers, but, — and herein lies the fundamental difference — we are not all prevailers. Caught in the web and twists of human passions so many have not the will to win and are forever defeated. The glory of Reverdy Cassius Ransom is the glory of survival; the heritage he bequeaths us is that of the Prevailer. Jacob the prototype, Reverdy Cassius Ransom the modern pattern of prevailing power.

Prince among men, scholar, poet, author, Religious Statesman, Educator, Civic Leader, Sage of Tawawa Chimney Corner, Trailblazer and Champion of Negro Liberty, Friend of Man, Son of Ohio, he will this day be laid to rest in his native soil, and in one of his Ohio Valleys, at a time when the early spring makes mockery of winter's harsh strength; when the grass grows verdant and the trees put forth their trembling arms to enfold the early bursts of green glory. The overcoming grace of spring is upon us. This too is indicative of the character and temper of the man whom we eulogize. Nature conspires to call him great.

He prevailed over overwhelming physical odds. He was born a frail child; grew up with what appeared to be a delicate physique; never over 170 pounds in weight yet measuring six feet one inch in height. No insurance company would take risks on his life. Yet he lived to survive over ninety years of a fully crowded mentally and physically

active life. The record tells us that he was born in 1861, but records being what they were in those days, some suspect that he had seen the century mark.

Those eighteen sixties! What a period of American history to conjure with! A period of stirring movements, of the rebirth of a nation, out of the bloody womb of civil warfare; and the emancipation of a race; a day unsuited to pigmies; a day whose stress and strain demanded stout bodies and strong minds. He met all the tests and outlasted most men of his generation and of the generation following. This was the day when the reverberations of cannons, the noise of musketry, the clash of steel had not ceased in the land; three months before the fateful shot fired at Fort Sumter; and when a nation was convulsed, gripped by fear. This child of tempest was to feel the full blast of that tempest most of his life.

He prevailed in intellectual combat. It is said of him that in those early days of his career he had borrowed and read every book of profound thought in his chosen field of inquiry, from the libraries in the places where he lived. His addresses were patterns of rhetorical skill, profound thought, and deep personal conviction, touched off by the flame of a dedicated spirit. Dr. Ferris in his volumes "The African Abroad" declared him the greatest orator of his day. Few men equalled him on the American Public Forum.

A disciple of Daniel Alexander Payne he fought ignorance wherever found particularly in the ministry. But he was not a blatant critic. He supported every institution of learning, and almost with his dying breath defended Wilberforce University and Payne Theological Seminary, his Alma Mater. He entered Wilberforce University in 1881 and graduated in 1886. The sufferings of Wilberforce tore at his heartstrings. What a tragedy! — and mark you and listen well! — history will yet tell the truth, that when with a bold stroke he unshackled Wilberforce from the toils of dependence and subservience, the Church did not have the vision and did not lend sufficient support of men and money to insure its release and to further its freer development. Yet already his wisdom is being recognized, and his courage is bearing fruits; even if it be the hard way.

• If it be true as Ralph Waldo Emerson has suggested "that an institution is the lengthened shadow of a man", it is equally true that a man is the lengthened shadow of an institution. Here he was befriended by Bishop Benjamin Arnett. Around the old Tawawa



Chimney Corner he lived and worked and studied and was helped. Years after when this historic building was destroyed by fire he led the church in help to Bishop Arnett for its rebuilding. Still years after he bought the property where he died. Some years ago in a moment of crisis he in turn befriended the widow of Bishop Arnett and has supported young men and women in their quest for knowledge. And so the chain lengthens. This is the genius of Wilberforce. How can anyone believe that it is within the power of any man to destroy Wilberforce? Begone! You fight not against flesh, but spirit. The stars in their courses fight Sisera. We are the lengthened shadows of Wilberforce University.

• In Political Science he towered above his competitors. He dared to carve out new destinies for his race at a time when it was anathema to be other than a Republican. He gave to his people and to the world new interpretations of the Emancipation Act of Abraham Lincoln without denying him the prestige and greatness that belong to this beloved figure of our history.

• With rapier-like thrust he turned back the assaults of the would-be leaders of the race who for minor political considerations and in the spirit of expediency would accept a place less than the best for the American colored man.

He prevailed in the social and civic struggles of his day. He was friend, champion, protector of all the flotsam and jetsam of the social stream in the communities where he labored. Jane Adams and Reverdy Cassius Ransom were the idols and hopes of the oppressed, disfranchised and submerged of Chicago. He gave us the first institutional church of the connection where men of every race and color found sympathy, understanding and support. Men and women everywhere were made better citizens because he rescued them and set their feet on the higher road. Surely their offsprings wherever they are today are honoring his memory.

• He lived where people lived and sat in the seats of the voiceless. Hygiene, proper work conditions, opportunities, educational, political, economic, better housing conditions, the right to vote and the exercise of that right, — yea every facet of human living engaged his total strength. With Dubois and Trotter and others he initiated The Niagara Movement which eventuated in the National Association For The Advancement of Colored People. His life was often threatened as he breached the walls in the very center of greatest civic and social injustices — the deep South. Today we need his voice and pen in our

hour of second emancipation and of greatest danger to our freedom. For his was the clear voice and the unsheathed sword without equivocation or compromise or subtleties or gradualism as he strode, the plumed knight that he was across this land of inequalities.

He was advisor to Presidents. He knew Frederick Douglass, Dunbar, Sojourner Truth, Henry Longfellow, Henry Ward Beecher, Elijah McCoy, Andrew Carnegie, William Rockefeller, B. K. Bruce, John M. Langston, J. B. Foraker, William McKinley, DeWitt Talmadge and others. Still later he was friend and counsellor to every great figure of our nation.

He was knighted by President Tubman of the Republic of Liberia, honored by the Kappa Alpha Psi and other great bodies of leaders. He was an internationalist both in Church and State; early advocate of Ecumenical Christianity; represented his church at the first Conference of World Methodism. He was one of the founders of the Federal Council of Churches of Christ in America; founder and first President of the Fraternal Council of Negro Churches. At Flushing, Ohio in 1950 a grateful state and city paid tribute to his greatness by erecting and dedicating a statue of him.

He had power with men. He gave leadership superb, objective and impersonal. He instinctively drew men to him and prevailed gloriously over the prejudices that barred his progress. Once really you were his, you were never lost to him. His sons and daughters are everywhere. Let us inscribe on his tombstone "He was a maker of man." He could flay you with his words or the look on his face, but he never destroyed. Men followed him because they believed he was dominated by highest motives.

Does anyone question where Reverdy Cassius Ransom would be to-day in this hour of new ventures in African Methodism? Twice before he led us to unscaled heights. He had daring; he was progressive but never a demagogue. He did not use his power over men for personal gain. His eloquence was never cheapened by false ends sought or by appeal to mob hysteria.

We would do well to hearken to his voice in any programme of expansion. Hear him, lest in unburdening our church of wrongs at one point we may add tyrannies and burdens far worse at another.

He served his church with a devotion reminiscent of those earlier heroes like unto Paul Quinn and which somehow the ministry have lost in large measure in this day of our largess, when spiritual flabbiness has overtaken the church of the Crucified Lord. From 1885 when he was made a licentiate to the day of active Episcopal retire-



ment in 1948 when he became historiographer, he was pastor, General Officer, Bishop, preacher without a superior. From his first General Conference as delegate in 1896 and in each succeeding one, to the last in 1956 where a grateful church honored him, he was never found wanting in courage, in vision and in execution of that vision.

\* He had power with God. For it was in the realm of spirit his battles were hardest fought and dearest won. No accident that this account of Jacob was heavily scored in his personal bible. Flesh of Jacob's flesh and of ours too, he was fitted by experience to understand human frailties, to understand the struggle at Jabbox and the beasts of Ephesus; the battles of Armageddon; the valley of Adjudon; Paul's thorn of the flesh; the gnawing devastating appetites that maim and kill so many men of weaker stuff. He knew how to wrestle with the angel and to prevail. He knew self-abasement and glorious personal triumph. His moral code was neither hypocritical or self-pitying. They who criticised parts of his book "The Pilgrimage of Harriet Ransom's Son" which a leading magazine described as "The 'Confessions of a Bishop'", did not understand; no more than we can properly assess a Moses, David, Paul, Savanarola, Saint Augustine and men of that select and immortal band.

\* He was spiritually sensitive. He felt deepest because he suffered most. He was most critical of himself. Often he tore the veil from himself and viewed with candor and disarming frankness his own frailties. Yet, — and mark you this was most important in his life — he was ever sure of God and His redeeming presence.

What shall we say of his preaching? J. Albert Johnson was to the world of analytical preaching what Reverdy Cassius Ransom was to the world of the Evangelical. Few men in the history of preaching could so combine solid, profound content, with eloquence, rhetorical flavor, chaste language, delivery, and the passion of the Evangel; as to make of his message an output of beauty, convincing power, inspiration, motivation, information. — a work of art most excellent. You came away from the preaching of a Fosdick or Johnson with intellect spurred, moral sensibilities refined, spirit stimulated. You leave the place where a Ransom stood and preached, with all of this, plus a hot flame burning your soul and with a new and deeper commitment and dedication. Great preaching resulting from great living! If you would be a great preacher, live dangerously with and for God.

He was blessed in his gift of help-mates. Emma Ransom whom most of us knew so well was friend mother and advisor to so many. She was frugal, dignified, sympathetic, a great civic and religious

worker, and bore his burden with rare insight, intelligence, understanding and love.

• Today our hearts are borne on a never ending-stream of gratitude and praise to Myrtle Teal Ransom this widow whose devotion and care in the physically burdened years shall ever remain green in our memory; and the story as it shall unfold itself shall be the occasion for inspiration, faith, love for others in the generations to come. Hers was the alabaster box of precious ointment poured out without stint, without regard to stress or strain, time or tide — a devotion so rare and unique and unselfish as to challenge our best praise.

Is there anyone that would disallow a personal note? He was my best friend, yea more, father in the spirit. He was there at every point of turning in my career. Young manhood, Exhorter, Local Preacher, Licentiate, Deaconate, Eldership, Training, Marriage, first appointment, promotion, birth of children, Consecration as Bishop. We — the family — owe him much so very much. No accident that we should be here on this campus and at his bedside with members of his family when he drew his last breath. God bless the family. In a truly special sense — my family.

Discount, ye cynic and hyper-critic, our traditional eschatological assumption of Saint Peter as guard to the entrance of Paradise! But for many of us it is an assumption of great spiritual value. It has meaning far beyond your narrow views. Peter Chief of denier, the forgiven of the Lord, gives entrance to those who also denied their Lord and are forgiven.

Mourn not O Family! O Church! O Friend! On Wednesday afternoon, April 22 at four o'clock there came a knock at heaven's door. No hesitant nor afraid, but sure and bold. "Who art thou?" cried Saint Peter. "Why crave you entrance into this place of bliss?" A voice we knew assured and vibrant cried "It is I O Peter, I, Ransom the Ransomed of the Lord! I come pleading no merits of my own but the strength of Him whose strength has been made perfect in my weakness." "Enter Thou!" answered Peter, "Thou battle-scarred veteran of a hundred battlefields, Evangel of the cross-ways, hero of the crowded ways of men, thigh bone disjointed and sword broken, but with hilt still in thy hand, and the light of victory in thine eyes. Come, Thou shalt now stand upon the sea of glass mingled with fire; Thou shalt receive the palm of the victor; for Thou hast prevailed over the beast and over the dragon and finally conquered death. Hesitate not, Ransom the Ransomed. Thou hast found favor with God and Men and hast prevailed!"





Illustration of a Native American man standing on a rocky outcrop, holding a bow and arrow. The illustration is part of a book titled "The Indian of the North" by James A. H. Murray, published by the American Museum of Natural History, New York, 1901. The book is a hardcover with a dark cover and a title label on the front. The illustration is a sepia-toned drawing of a Native American man standing on a rocky outcrop, holding a bow and arrow. He is wearing a feathered headdress and a fringed garment around his waist. The background is dark and textured.